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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

BOOKS.

DEVIL TALES. By VIRGINIA FRAZER BOYLE. Illustrated by A. B. Frost. Harper & Brothers. 1900.

Stories of the old South, recorded by one who learned them in her childhood from the negroes of Mississippi. The tales are repeated for the most part in the forceful, native phrase of the black "mammy," to whom they had come as a heritage of generations. But inasmuch as they are embellished by suggestive setting, and moulded into artistic form by graceful narration, they must be assigned to the domain of literary rather than scientific folk-lore. It is, however, a work of wide interest, not only by reason of the weird fascination of the tales themselves, but because of their value to the psychologist and anthropologist, in showing, as they do, the superstition which is as warp in the characters of these dusky children, and which, crossed and recrossed by the woof of daily doings, makes up the fabric of their life.

The ten tales of the collection have for their common theme the baleful influence of the Evil One, who wanders abroad in the quarters during "de dark er de moon;" and the counter conjuring of the good Hoodoo, whose business it is to beat the devil at his own game.

There is a suggestion of Faust in the tragedy of "Marse Charles," the only one of the tales that deals with the "Quality," and a hint of classic Psyche in the clay butterflies fashioned by the crazed old Maumer to "fetch back de soul er Cindy's baby." Most of the stories recall Æsop's Fables, from the active participation of the beasts and birds, here regarded as emissaries of Satan. Herein, also, is Darwinism reversed, so to speak. "Brer Baily hain't got no call ter 'low dat niggers is 'v'luted fum Afiker monkeys, fur dey 'v'lute back inter monkeys, sho, mum!" For this was the punishment of the transgressing piccaninny who, bribed by Satan, stole the widow's last coal of fire.

Nor is this African philosophy free from the complacent egoism that marks the dogmatic wherever found: "Now white folks ain' lack niggers," old Daddy Mose explains; "dey 'll look at de new moon ober de lef' shoul-der th'u' de trees an' nebber eben tek time ter say er pra'r back'ards: whilst dey puts on de right shoe fust, an' wonder what's de matter wid dey business when hit go wrong. . . . White folks sho' is cu'is."

The illustrations are genuine illuminations to the text, and help to make the volume one to be welcomed by all who find interest in folk-tales, and care for their preservation. The tales belong to the past, and must have departed with it had they not found in Mrs. Boyle a competent and sympathetic chronicler.

Frank Russell.